

MARINE RECREATIONAL INFORMATION PROGRAM

Work Plan for Improving Marine Recreational Fishing Data
Collection Programs

Prepared by the MRIP Operations Team

May 23, 2007

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1.0 Background

Fisheries managers in the United States have the difficult task of managing fish stocks over fine geographic and temporal scales with data from recreational fishing surveys that were originally designed to track broad trends. Over time, angler confidence in the surveys has eroded and pressure has increased to improve data collection and estimation procedures - the National Research Council (NRC) Review highlighted many potential problems with recreational fishery surveys. There are now two key challenges: First, to facilitate effective management and science by providing more accurate estimates of fishing catch and effort, and second, to make the process transparent in order to build angler confidence in those estimates.

Generally, the NRC Review did not prioritize which problems were most critical or provide plug-in solutions. Over the last year, NOAA Fisheries has been gathering input to identify the most critical needs for a new Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) in a variety of ways:

1. Meetings at the Pacific, Atlantic, and Gulf of Mexico interstate fisheries commissions to identify specific regional recreational fisheries information needs.
2. A national workshop of recreational fishery data users and data collection managers
3. Constituent teleconference listening sessions to allow input from anglers
4. Public review on the initial development plan to improve recreational fisheries statistics
(<http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/RecSurveyUpgrade/DevelopmentPlan.html>).
5. Construction and regular maintenance of a web site
(<http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/RecSurveyUpgrade/RecSurveyUpgrade.html>) to keep interested parties updated on ongoing activities and upcoming opportunities to become involved.
6. Preliminary evaluation by NOAA Fisheries (NMFS) Office of Science and Technology staff of the impact of potential sources of bias.

The MRIP Executive Steering Committee (ESC) charged the Operations Team with prioritizing recommendations for improving recreational fishing data collection programs, as well as developing a work plan to address the resulting recommendations. Based on the above inputs, as well as input from informal discussions with data managers, stock assessment scientists, and the fishing public, the Operations Team developed a list of general cross-cutting priorities to guide decision making and project planning within each of six regions; Western Pacific, Alaska, Pacific Coast, Gulf of Mexico, Caribbean, and Atlantic Coast (Appendix A) . This plan describes an approach to address the recommendations to improve marine recreational fishing data collection programs.

2.0 Approach

The Operations Team immediately recognized that a depth and diversity of skills beyond its membership was needed to implement the tasks encompassed within the general priorities. For this reason, the Operations Team recommends that the tasks associated with the different priorities be distributed among several work groups. The following sections provide descriptions, charges, milestones, and key deliverables for each of five work groups: Analysis, Design, Data Management and Standards, For Hire, and HMS (Highly Migratory Species). Details are not provided in this document for the Communications and Education Group (CEG) or the Registry Group (RG) because they are being formed and tasked directly by the ESC. However, the Operations Team expects to work closely with these groups once they are operational.

While the goal of this plan is to provide a National framework for developing, testing and implementing an improved marine recreational fishing data collection program, the Operations Team recognizes that each region has unique informational needs and challenges. The Operations Team considered establishing regional work groups to address regionally specific issues and recommendations. However, the Team recognized that in general, recommendations are fairly consistent among regions, and that forming regional work groups to address each recommendation would not be practical. As an alternative, the Operations Team proposes that work groups be provided with the flexibility to form subgroups on an as-needed basis to address regionally specific issues.

Ultimately, the size of each work group will be dictated by the magnitude of assigned work. However, the Operations Team proposes that work groups initially be populated by 12-15 members with appropriate levels of expertise and experience to complete assigned tasks. The Operations Team has identified several individuals as candidates for the various work groups (Appendix B). The Operations Team will provide each of the work groups with the flexibility to add new members as needed. Some individuals have been identified as potential candidates for more than one work group. The decision to participate in one or more of the work groups will be left to the discretion of the individual and his or her supervisor.

At the outset, each work group will receive the regional, prioritized lists of recommendations, as well as specific tasks associated with each of the recommendations (Appendix C). Work groups will be asked to develop detailed project plans to address each of the recommendations. Specific tasks are provided as examples and should not be considered to represent all of the tasks associated with each recommendation. Work groups will be responsible for reviewing the tasks, adding or removing tasks as necessary, and prioritizing the tasks within each recommendation based upon potential impact, ease of implementation (time and cost) and dependencies upon other tasks or recommendations. The Operations Team has provided preliminary priorities to facilitate this process. These tasks (or reports and recommendations resulting from the tasks) represent work group deliverables and are the foundation upon

which project plans should be developed. Priorities of both the recommendations and tasks should guide the project planning process. A project plan template will be provided.

Work groups will have the flexibility to convene at their own schedule. However, work groups will be required to submit informal monthly reports that document activities, progress and problems, and the status of ongoing and planned projects. In addition, work group chairs will be asked to participate in monthly conference calls with the chairs of the ESC, OT, RG and CEG to review work group progress, identify potential overlap and opportunities for collaboration among work groups, and discuss future planning efforts.

The Operations Team envisions that a variety of processes will be used by work groups to complete tasks, including the following:

Collaborative analysis, research, and design by work group members,
Project proposals for independent contractors,
Project proposals for academic consultants and/or academic grants.

Several recommendations that were classified as high priority by the Operations Team involve the expansion of data collection programs, or the collection of data at finer levels of temporal and/or geographic stratification to meet management or stock assessment needs. The Operations Team recognizes that these are high priority issues and should receive considerable attention as the survey redesign process evolves. However, the Operations Team feels that efforts to produce a sound sampling design should take precedence over efforts to improve precision or stretch the utility of the current program through increases in sample size. As a result, the Operations Team will not accept projects aimed at expanding the scope of current data collection programs until biases and assumptions of current programs have been addressed.

To initiate work, the Operations Team proposes a kickoff workshop that will include all work groups and address the following:

- Introduce work groups to ESC, OT, CEG and RG,
- Review standard operating procedures for the work groups,
- Discuss interactions and communications among work groups and teams,
- Communicate priorities and objectives,
- Have each work group select a chair,
- Have each work group review and prioritize tasks,
- Initiate planning process by having work groups outline project plans to address high priority recommendations,
- Review/Develop milestones and timelines for additional projects.

So that work can be initiated as quickly as possible, the Operations Team recommends that the kickoff workshop be held no later than the second week of August.

While the work groups will be responsible for developing and testing new methodologies and developing and documenting protocols, the Operations Team will ultimately be responsible for implementing improved data collection programs. As workgroups complete projects and provide recommendations, the Operations Team will utilize existing mechanisms, such as NOAA Contracts and cooperative agreements with the interstate fisheries commissions, to implement survey improvements. Where necessary, the Operations Teams will work with relevant partners and organizations to develop new mechanisms for implementing improvements.

2.1 Analysis Work Group

The Analysis Work Group (AWG) will be charged with analyzing and testing assumptions and potential sources of bias in the current system of recreational fishing surveys. Where possible, the AWG shall utilize existing sources of data to identify potential sources of bias in sampling and estimation procedures and quantify the impact of these biases on catch and effort statistics. In the absence of existing data, the AWG shall develop and implement projects to assess the impacts of bias on estimates. Ultimately, the AWG will recommend strategies to eliminate or mitigate biases in existing and future recreational fishing surveys.

2.2 Design Work Group

The Design Work Group (DWG) will be charged with developing and testing new data collection methodologies that address recommendations from the NRC Review, the Denver Workshop and the Magnuson-Stevens Reauthorization Act. The DWG will develop a system of surveys that is statistically robust, adaptive to changing fisheries management needs and responsive to constituent concerns. Ultimately, the DWG will recommend which methodologies to implement as part of the Marine Recreational Information Program.

2.3 Data Management and Standards Work Group

The Data Management and Standards Group (DMSG) will be charged with developing and maintaining data collection standards, protocols and data access portals for the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). The DMSG will ultimately be responsible for ensuring the comparability and compatibility of fishing statistics among regional data collection programs. To the greatest extent possible, the DMSG shall utilize the regional Fishery Information Networks (FINs) and the national Fishery Information System (FIS) to facilitate integration of regional surveys and survey statistics.

2.4 For Hire Work Group

The For-Hire Work Group (FHWG) will be charged with addressing data collection issues that are unique to charter, guide and head boat fishing activities.

Ultimately, the FHWG will recommend methodologies for collecting catch and effort data from the for-hire sector.

2.5 HMS Work Group

The HMS Work Group (HMSWG) will be charged with assessing the statistical design and effectiveness of current HMS data collection programs, developing new data collection methodologies as needed, and expanding the scope of HMS data collection efforts to meet management and science needs. Ultimately, the HMSWG will recommend methodologies for collecting HMS-specific catch and effort data.

4.0 Major Tasks and Milestones

Specific milestones for the first project year (June 1, 2007 – June 1, 2008) are provided below. Milestones proposed by the Operations Team involve several key assumptions. First, it is assumed that the ESC is able to secure significant time commitments from work group members. Second, the timelines assume that projects are fully funded (including premium required for rapid turnaround). The stated project durations and timelines may not be met if either of these assumptions are incorrect. Milestones may be adjusted based upon Work Group feedback.

4.1 Milestones Common to All Work Groups

Milestone	Date
Initial Work Group meeting	8/7/2007-8/9/2007
Selection of Work Group chair	MRIP Workshop
Make recommendations for additional Work Group members	MRIP Workshop
Review and prioritize Work Group tasks	MRIP Workshop
Outline high priority project plans	MRIP Workshop
Final project plans (from above outlines)	10/1/2007
Monthly reporting	Ongoing
Monthly conference calls with MRIP team chairs	Ongoing

4.2 Analysis Work Group Milestones

Milestone	Date
Report documenting results of analyses to evaluate whether estimation procedures appropriately match sample design	6/1/2008
Implementation of high priority projects	6/1/2008

4.3 Design Work Group Milestones

Milestone	Date
Expansion of Angler License Directory Survey (ALDS) / Coastal Household Telephone Survey (CHTS) dual-frame methodology to additional states (NC)	9/1/2007
Extension of Gulf ALDS through 2008	1/1/2008
Report documenting existing data collection programs that utilize databases of licensed saltwater anglers as sampling frames. The report shall include a recommended methodology for sampling anglers as additional states implement saltwater licenses	6/1/2008
Implementation of high priority projects	6/1/2008

4.4 Data Management and Standards Work Group Milestones

Milestone	Date
Documented data collection and data management goals, minimum data elements, timelines of data availability, data quality standards, and data accessibility standards	6/1/2008
Documented standard protocols for sampler training, interviewing procedures, and QA/QC procedures	6/1/2008
Implementation of high priority projects	6/1/2008

4.5 For-Hire Work Group Milestones

Milestone	Date
Report documenting existing for-hire data collection programs, including an evaluation of the pros and cons of various reporting methods, and the benefits and limitations of individual programs	6/1/2008
Implementation of high priority projects	6/1/2008

4.6 HMS Work Group Milestones

Milestone	Date
Report evaluating current HMS data collection programs	6/1/2008
Implementation of high priority projects	6/1/2008